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FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM Morning Edition

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SUBJECT Frank Terpil

BOB EDWARDS: Frank Terpil worked for the Central Intelligence Agency for many years. But in the early 1970s, Terpil left the agency to work for himself. Among other things, he sold eavesdropping equipment to Uganda's dictator Idi Amin, hired assassins on behalf of Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi, and provided terrorist training to several factions in the Middle East. It was, he admits, a nasty and often corrupt business, but Terpil says he did not have a monopoly on such affairs. He says his biggest competitor was the CIA.

Terpil has been a fugitive for three years now. But in this exclusive interview with Jim Hogan, Terpil explains why he doesn't want to return to the United States.

Here's Hogan's report.

JIM HOGAN: Frank Terpil is an angry man with nothing to lose and a great deal to say. That he has nothing to lose is owing to the fact that he's a man on the run, a fugitive in flight from a 53-year sentence, Interpol, and the intelligence services of at least three countries, including his own. He's lost everything: his business, his home and his family. But what makes him angry, he says, is that it was all taken from him without a fair trial. According to Terpil, he and his cohort, Gary Korkola (?), had no choice but to become fugitives. A trial in absentia and a harsh sentence were inevitable because they couldn't afford to plea-bargain. Any sentence would have been too long.

FRANK TERPIL: We had already been told that we'll be dead, no matter if we received one year or two years. We would be dead, we would be taken, we'd be finished, we'd be killed.

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And this was a prime factor in our leaving.

HOGAN: Terpil believed that he'd be killed in prison because he knew too much. And one of the things that he knew too much about, he says, was an alleged U.S. intelligence operation in which flights were made to the Golden Triangle, a remote area on the border between Burma and Thailand.

✓ TERPIL: What was on the plane? Gold. Ten million bucks at a time in gold. It was going to the Golden Triangle to pay off the warlords, the drug lords. What the idea was, they could not -- in the Golden Triangle, you could not buy people. Money meant nothing because they were making more money on the drugs. You had to buy warlords. How'd you do it? You gave them more money than their product -- for their product.

Now what do you do with all the opium? You reinvest it in your own operations. Now...

HOGAN: Wait a minute. You don't reinvest opium. You have to sell it.

TERPIL: You sell it.

✓ HOGAN: The ostensible purpose of the operation was to remove large quantities of opium from the world marketplace. In reality, Terpil says, the opium was diverted, resold, and the profit laundered through a consortium of banks in the Far East.

✓ TERPIL: And what you did is now you've got an accelerated fund. And all of a subject it became a project that was in a tailspin. You were getting more money than you knew what to hell to do with.

✓ HOGAN: Most of the money, Terpil insists, was reinvested and used to fund covert intelligence operations in Indochina and elsewhere. A key role in the scheme was played by the Nugen-Hand (?) Bank, an Australian-based financial institution whose top executives included many former high-ranking military and CIA officials. The founders of that bank, Frank Nugen and Michael Hand, have since met unhappy ends. Nugen was found shot to death in the Australian Outback three years ago. While former U.S. intelligence operative Mike Hand has disappeared entirely, as indeed have many of the bank's records.

Some of those records probably concerned Frank Terpil's sometime partner Edwin P. Wilson, an important client of the bank's. According to Terpil, Wilson used the bank to finance the purchase of classified military hardware. Himself a former CIA agent, Wilson represented Libya in a meeting with the American manufacturer of that equipment.

TERPIL: Who was the buyer? Wilson. Where did they meet? Moscow. Where does the money come from? Singapore. Where does it go through? Nugen-Hand.

HOGAN: While the Nugen-Hand Bank has since collapsed, Terpil says that nothing has changed but the center of operations. Action central is now Miami.

TERPIL: That's the base. The whole goddam thing has moved down there. Where did they come from? Laos. Where was it before? Golden Triangle. Where did the money come from? Nugen-Hand.

HOGAN: To understand Frank Terpil is no easy task. To the courts, he's a criminal. To his friends and family, he seems almost a martyr. And to the intelligence community, he's just a rogue. They see his association with Idi Amin and Qaddafi as repugnant, his arms sales deplorable. He exports violence, they say, and does so for profit.

But Terpil says that he is neither guiltier nor more innocent than the military establishment as a whole. He points to Pentagon arms sales to Latin America, to CIA operations in Indochina, and to U.S. support for strongmen such as Ferdinand Marcos and madmen such as Pol Pot. It's a view with which his Third World hosts would seem to agree.

TERPIL: Leaders of various countries do not consider my -- or they may consider my case more of a martyr case. They don't consider that I've really done anything criminal or violent, any more so than their people. So I do enjoy sympathies of what you might consider some of the Third World countries. While they don't consider me a hero, they don't consider a criminal, either.

EDWARDS: Jim Hogan's interview with Frank Terpil appears in this month's issue of Penthouse magazine.

Terpil's former associate, Edwin Wilson, was sentenced yesterday in U.S. district court to 25 years in prison for trying to kill two prosecutors, five government witnesses, and a business associate. Wilson already is serving long prison terms for shipping arms to Libya.